

An Interview With

BARNEY AND WILLA JEAN GRAVES

August 28, 1986

Barney and Willa Jean Graves were interviewed on August 28, 1986, at the home of Ned and Margaret Linegar. The Linegars conducted the interview.

The tape is on file at the Estes Park Public Library and may be checked out. The reader should keep in mind that this is a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written word.

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Interview with Barney and Willa Jean Graves (BG) (WG)

Date of Interview: August 28, 1986

Interviewers: Ned Linegar (NL)

Margaret Linegar (ML)

NL First, we need to identify voices. Barney, how would you characterize yourself. Do you want to say how old you are? Would you like to do that?

BG Ned, I don't mind doing that. I'm 71 years old.

NL You're a young man. I'm 72. And were you born in Estes Park?

BG I was born in Longmont, Colorado, in 1915, January 18th. I didn't move to Estes Park until 1935, but my family used to own the Ferguson Ranch. My great-grandmother bought the Ferguson Ranch in 1901.

ML Where is the Ferguson Ranch?

NL The Hummingbird, on Mary's Lake Road.

BG She bought that for a thousand dollars from the King Ransom Packing Company.

NL What was her name?

BG Mary Lord Carter. Then, of course, my grandmother inherited, and she was Susie Carter McGuire. It went on down to my mother and my father, Lois Graves and Clarence Graves.

NL This was your maternal grandmother and great-grandmother?

BG Yes.

NL Clarence and Lois, now where did they start their family history? Are they Longmont or Colorado residents?

BG My grandmother and grandfather and great-grandmother all lived at 6th and Kenmark. My grandfather was an attorney at the time, and Susie McGuire was a registrar for Boulder County. She took care of all the vital statistics. My mother went to school at Longmont High School.

After I was born, they owned this place up here, and they used to come up here in Model-T Fords. I must back up a little. My father and mother and Susie used to come up in a horse and buggy. They'd come up by Lyons and go to Sam Service's store to buy kerosene for the lamps.

ML How long did that take?

BG It took most of the day.

For the purpose of indicating unclear passages that could not be transcribed, ellipses (...) have been used throughout this manuscript.

NL Was your father born in Colorado?

BG No, he was born in Norton, Kansas, and he came out and worked for the Great Western Sugar Company in Longmont. Later he worked for Pride of the Rockies Flour Mill in Longmont. It was during these years that he married my mother.

We always called him Pop, but his name was Clarence.

NL How did he get to be Pop? You called him Pop?

BG I think he inherited that when he lived in Estes Park. I think his employees and everyone else just got in the habit of calling him Pop.

ML Wasn't your grandfather the first--what was he for the state of Colorado?

BG My great-grandfather was Byron Lord Carr. Byron Lord Carr was in the Civil War and had one of his arms cut off. He had to get special dispensation from the Knights Templars to remain with the group, and he was very proud of that. He'd put his sleeve in his pocket. Anyway, he was then the first Attorney General of the state of Colorado in the present capitol building. He was quite an attorney for water rights.

NL I think your dad inherited an interest in water rights.

BG That's very true. And then Lou McGuire, who was Susie McGuire's husband, was quite an attorney, for there were lots of foreigners and Mexicans. He spoke Spanish, and he was quite popular with them. Then, Lou went on, and he was a member of the Colorado National Guard. He went to the coal miner's strike they had down in southern Colorado. When my uncle was born in Longmont, his name was Byron L. McGuire, they slowed the train down for Lou to get off. He fell down, and it cut off part of his leg.

NL That's your grandfather's son.

(We want to identify your voice, Willa.) When did your dad start business in Estes Park? He had the Ferguson Ranch, Barney?

BG That was just a summer place like so many have now. Dad followed the Pride of the Rockies Milling Company for many years. He was an auditor, and he would run these elevators around the state. The Dixie Portland people moved him back to Washington, Missouri. And then he came to Estes Park and started the Red and White Grocery store.

NL When was that?

BG That was in 1935. That was where the Bartlett Building is downtown now. The same Macdonald Book Store was there then, and I think they also had a laundry. I remember Jessie Macdonald; she had the book store.

NL How long did he have the grocery store?

BG When I came up here, I went to the University of Colorado for six months. I'd already gone to Warrensburg Teachers College back in Missouri for a year.

NL You were in elementary school in Longmont, is that right?

BG In Broomfield, Colorado. That was a part of the milling business. Then, we went over to Sterling, and I went to Junior High School and back to Denver. I went to North Denver High one year, and then we went back to Washington, Missouri. I graduated from high school back there.

NL Then, where did you go to University?

BG Then, I went to Warrensburg Teachers one year and then.--

NL Were you going to be a teacher?

BG No. It was a college in those days that we could afford. Then, my sister had come back to Colorado for asthma, and she lived with Susie McGuire.

NL And your sister's name right now?

BG Right now it's Margaret Mott, and, of course, Margaret Mary Graves. She graduated from high school in Longmont and then graduated from the University of Colorado.

NL So, the two of you are the only children.

BG Yes. Her husband is a very successful attorney in Denver, and they both live in Denver.

NL So, in 1935 you began your career in Estes Park. At that time your dad was operating the Red and White Grocery, and you were twenty years old. Did you help your dad in the store?

BG Yes. And then Dad sold the store. I hope I can remember all of this. I believe Dad went to work for Pop Baldridge, and he had the hardware store.

NL Where the present Estes Park Hardware Store is now?

BG Yes. And, of course, Pop Baldridge had the hardware store, and he was also an electrician. They laid floor covering, and they did everything. So, I was kind of out on my own. I was a cowboy for a while. I didn't make any money. I had a little stable out where the entrance to the Country Club is now. I called it the "Wagon Wheel Stables." I was the best drug store cowboy in Estes Park. I had about twelve horses and did just what the tourists do now.

ML Did they just put the reins over the horses' necks and let them go home?

BG Yes. They were pretty good at that.

NL Did you let the riders go out on their own?

BG Yes.

NL These days the stables do not do that.

WG There were no fences in those days. You could ride any place.

BG I understand why you asked that question. In those days everyone went out on their own and turned their horses loose. They'd all go back to the stables.

ML That's interesting. That's something I didn't know about you.

WG Tell them about when you went to work for the Adams Tunnel.

NL Hold on just a second.

BG I wasn't a cowboy very long. I didn't even make a living at it, and so consequently that fall we came back. They were building the bowling alley out where Timberline is now.

NL Is this 1936 or 7?

BG Oh, yes, it would be that late at least. We didn't have backhoes or bulldozers in those days, and they used slips drawn by a team of horses. So, I went down and asked Lige Rivers if I could have a job. Lige gave me a job, but I was probably one of the poorest drivers he ever had. I didn't last there very long.

NL Tell us who Lige Rivers is?

BG Lige Rivers had the stable down there where one of Brodie's buildings is now, but, of course, that's all been torn down now. He had one of the stables on main street, and he had rental horses and horses to pull wagons and to do this type of work.

NL So, you went to work for him?

BG And I probably lasted a couple of weeks, and that's about the extent of it. And I went to work for Wolfe, and he had the bowling alley. He owned the building, and he had eight alleys. He was very strict. I worked for Wolfe, I think, for two or three years, and that was the time they were building the Adams Tunnel.

NL That would have been 1937?

BG Yes, it would have been. So, anyway, Slim Merrick was a foreman out there. One night I asked him if he had any jobs, and he said, "I sure do." And that's when I started work in the tunnel, and that's an experience I never will forget.

NL You worked at this end?

BG At this end.

NL And they worked at the other end, too, didn't they?

BG They did and connected at the middle. And I remember the very first night they furnished the hard hat for me, and I had to have clothes to shed the water from the drilling machines. I didn't know enough to put some wet cotton in my ears to keep out the sounds of the machines, and I couldn't even hear when I got home. So that went on until I learned the ropes.

NL How many men were working for the tunnel?

BG I think we must have had about twenty-five men to a shift, and there were three shifts that worked inside the tunnel. It was continuous work.

NL This was the Bureau of Reclamation?

BG Yes. We worked for Sam Magoffin, and as you know, he's quite a benefactor of Estes Park. He did a lot of things, and he was a good contractor. He had good men working for him that managed, etc. With all their mechanics and other men, they must have had another fifteen or twenty men outside working there.

NL It was a matter of drilling and then bringing the dirt out. Is that right?

BG That's right. The Bureau of Reclamation and the men in Magoffin's crew would always look at the rock to see whether it needed shoring up or not, and if it did, we'd go back, set steel, and shore it up with steel. That steel remained a part of the concrete after it was concreted.

ML Were you ever injured in your job?

BG I was injured once. Fortunately, it was not a serious injury, but they had to take me out to Dr. Wiest, and he took care of me. It turned out all right.

NL How long did it take to build the tunnel?

BG The tunnel was let in contracts with the Bureau of Reclamation, and Magoffin and I started about the time after the first contract was finished and went on with the tunnel. Magoffin's crew drilled to the center of the mountain, and then the other crew was having such a time on the other side of the mountain that Magoffin went on and drilled. We drilled eight miles from this side underground.

NL That's farther than the middle of the mountain?

BG That's right.

NL The other crew was having difficulty, is that right?

BG Their rock was faulty, and so consequently they were a little slower.

BG It behooved the Bureau to move the job along.

NL Did you stay with it?

BG I stayed with it until the tunnel was concreted and until we had cleaned out the tunnel.

NL Have you ridden through the tunnel recently?

BG No. I surely haven't.

NL When I was at the Y and at the Chamber, I went through the tunnel a couple of times.

WG That must be an experience.

BG It is. I'm sure it is.

NL That's interesting. So that was really '26-'37, was that it?

WG The year before he went to work for his father at Remington Arms.

BG Yes, I overlooked that, but the tunnel wasn't going at that time. I went down and worked for Remington Arms in Denver. They stored arms and made bullets for the army during World War II. And then I went back.

Well, Ned, I'm just going to throw these things in. They shut the tunnel down once because they didn't think it was conducive to the war effort, so there was a bunch of us, the miners from the Adams Tunnel, that went up to Sunrise, Wyoming, and worked in the iron ore mine for the steel company in Pueblo.

NL They didn't think the tunnel was relevant to the war effort?

BG So we went up there and worked there for about six months. It wasn't very long. And then I went back to Sunflower Ordnance Works in Lawrence, Kansas. That's where they made powder back there. Then, they decided maybe the tunnel was good for the war effort, and so I came back and started working again for the tunnel.

NL That's interesting.

WG But the lake hadn't been formed. It wasn't formed until 1949, I guess.

BG Oh, no. They had to build the siphon and everything. When I worked for the tunnel, after we finished the Adams Tunnel, I went over and worked at Ramshorn Tunnel. I helped concrete that.

NL That's the tunnel above Mary's Lake.

BG And then I went over to Prospect Tunnel, and I helped drill and concrete that and also the surge tank. After that was finished, that was the end of my tunnel experience.

NL You've had quite an experience with the Bureau of Reclamation.

BG Oh, yes. It was a good experience, too.

NL We don't realize how important this project is, and we don't say much about it to visitors. We have some visitors at the Chamber of Commerce who ask about it, you know.

BG One of the many things that I see today when they talk about water and getting water to this side is that we've got a tunnel and can send it through. That tunnel will hold more water than is going through it, and I say this when this Windy Gap Project came on line that they had room to send it through and still not interfere with Big Thompson water. They've still got plenty of room to send the water through to this side and drinking, irrigating, and so many things that they can use it for.

NL It has been an amazing project with the power plant. That was quite an experience. Did you finish with the Bureau of Reclamation in 1942?

BG That would be pretty good, and then I went to work for my dad.

NL And he started the propane gas business.

BG Dad sold bottled gas for Skelgas. That was one of the first things that my father did up here. Actually, Dad was a pioneer with the propane business up here. He started with the bottled gas. Mostly in those times we'd go out and hook it up to a stove or a space heater, something like that. It wasn't really too big a job. Of course, in those days Dad laid linoleum, sold appliances, and bottled gas, and then started hauling the gas in trucks.

NL Was the office or store on the north side of Elkhorn Avenue?

BG Yes. Right next to the National Park Hotel.

NL Where the Happy Texan is now.

BG So I learned everything the hard way from my father. That was the only way we knew to do it in those days. I tell you I never will forget it-- the service calls after hours, in those days not being smart about what you were doing with heating appliances and things like that. But time marches on, and you finally absorb it until you think you're doing a pretty good job.

NL Well, really in this mountain area propane gas provided the opportunity to build the area.

BG It still is. I can honestly say that my experience with propane gas has been very good because we've been able to do everything: heat water, heat the home, cook with it, air condition with it.

NL What percentage of the homes are gas powered? Majority of them?

BG Well, Ned, You know Public Service came in, and they took over the majority of homes in the city limits. Then, they went out to the Y Camp, but I

BG would say outside of the city limits before electricity came in that we would service fifty or seventy-five per cent.

NL Is electricity now being utilized more?

BG Yes, it is. About anything you do in the home, cooking and heating and water heating.

NL We probaby should indicate that you have now sold your business.

BG Yes.

NL This is August 28, 1986, and you're now retired.

WG July 31st, 1986, he retired.

NL We've been talking about retirement tonight. It's a new experience. It really is. You know you work constantly at a job, and then suddenly you don't go to the office. Of course, you always have projects written down in your mind when you can get to them.

ML Everyone says, "What do you do in the wintertime? I've heard some pretty crazy parties went on. What was the fun in Estes Park?"

NL We ought to talk a little about extra-curricular activities.

BG I've never lacked for having entertainment in Estes Park. When I worked in the grocery store, there was a group of people, the National Park Rangers, the school teachers, and the superintendent. We would go out and ski and ice skate, and surprising enough in those days we didn't drink. We didn't know about drinking. In all my life that I've lived in Estes Park, I've never lacked for entertainment, and I mean it. Sometimes, you had to make it yourself; sometimes you had to play poker or play cards.

WG Or you went to the Legion, or you went bowling. Those were the two activities.

BG Absolutely. And then we're close enough to the valley that we could go to football games and even watch our own teams up here. I've never lacked for entertainment. And, of course, I'll be very honest with you. When we talk about skiing, we didn't have the greatest skis and boots that they have nowadays.

We had a 1936 pick-up. It runs in my mind! We'd go out the old Fall River Road and go just about to the top every Sunday. And George Swift would go up there with a grader and open the road. He worked for the Park Service, and we'd do that for Sunday, take our lunch and ski all day. We used to go up to Bear Lake and do the same thing. The rangers participated with us. Jack Moomaw used to be right in amongst all of us.

NL This was in the late 1940's.

ML It looks like rough skiing.

BG Of course, those are the drifts that everyone loves. We weren't the

BG skiers they are nowadays, but we had a good time.

NL When did they start the ski jump on Old Man Mountain?

BG I wish I could tell you. George Peck would be an authority on that. Also, there were some Olympic skiers who were up here and jumped up there. They were Olympic caliber. And they used to haul the snow in during the summertime to jump on Old Man Mountain.

ML We saw that in 1949.

BG Did you really?

NL Those were interesting days, and we're talking about forty years ago. Barney, tell us a little bit more of your impressions of life in Estes Park in those days. Anything you'd like to add.

BG Well, Ned, where can you go and live in such a nice community and have all the things that they have everywhere else? I have no regrets or complaints of my life in Estes Park. I've gone through some rough times, and I've gone through some good times.

NL You were on the Town Board of Trustees?

BG Yes, I was on the Town Board of Trustees, and that was probably one of the greatest experiences of my life.

NL How many years?

BG Well, I was on six years, and before that I was on the Planning Commission. I was also President of the Recreation District, and I was on the Sanitation District forever and ever. Charlie Hix appointed me, and then I was elected about five or six times.

WG You were also on the School Board.

BG Yes, with Tom McCracken and Dr. Crewel (Sp?) and...

WG You bought property where the schools are now.

BG Walt Edwards was the Superintendent of Schools.

NL Was the grade school where the First National Bank Building is now and the high school where the Municipal Building is now?

ML It was '57 when they bought that.

BG We were instrumental in buying that property.

NL One of the things that is so fascinating about your experience in Estes Park is that you have participated in so many different aspects of the community life.... Other men have made contributions, but I think your dad and you have made more of a contribution to public life than others.

MG I think parallels are the Dannels, Henry and Bernie. I think they're father and son.

NL Did you get tired of public service?

BG That's a challenge all the time. I got in on urban renewal. We're a growing community, and we want to keep it that way.

NL Is there anything else we ought to have for our history? Willa Jean, tell us a little bit about yourself.

WG Barney and I have been married only eleven years. I moved here in 1949 with my first husband, whose parents had also been early residents of Estes Park. We managed Sprague's Lodge out in the National Park. That was in 1950. We worked with Ed and Dorothy Stopher, and we were there about five years. Then, we moved to California in 1958.

NL What was your family name?

WG Claude Verry was the first Chamber President in Estes Park in 1923, so the family went back a long ways. Then, I moved back to Denver in 1965 with my three children, went to work with the Denver Chamber of Commerce, and eventually ended up back here in Estes Park in 1975 by marrying Byron. It was like coming home to me. Barney has two sons, and I have two sons and a daughter. Between us we have six grandsons. We're very happy, and we're looking forward to retirement together.

ML Tell us about Sprague's Lodge. I don't think I was ever in it.

WG I think one of the neatest things about Sprague's Lodge was that the families came year after year and met maybe a family from California or Illinois or New York. This was the one time that they all came together. Sprague's was a very old lodge, and at that time it was a concession with the National Park. It was on the Bear Lake Road...Brinwood, Bear Lake Lodge. Anyway, it was a concession, and there was no way that any improvements could be made. Each room had a pull chain light, and there were only two or three rooms in the main lodge that had private baths. Everybody shared, but it was a delightful place. Lots of foreigners came because they liked the hiking aspect.

NL Did Ed Stopher operate it?

WG Right. That and Stead's Ranch. We were up here with Ed about seven years during the remodeling era of Stead's, after he bought it from the Lewises. Ed lives in Scottsdale and is retired and was up here last summer.

Dr. Mall delivered my middle child in the little hospital on Main Street. My daughter lives in Longmont with her husband and two sons. My middle son lives in Denver and has two sons. My youngest son is working at the University of California at Santa Barbara.

NL We haven't talked about your children, have we?

BG Butch and his wife Shauna are running a restaurant over at Beaver Run in Vail. The other boy is with American Motors and has a very responsible job with them. They're in Milwaukee. He's married and has two sons.

BG Both of them played football for the high school up here, but Steve went on and played for the University of Colorado. He made quite a name for himself down there, and we're kind of proud of him.

WG We still keep in touch with some of the boys he played with. They come up to the Michelob Golf Tournament.

Steve was in Dallas.

NL We enjoyed talking to you, and we appreciate it.

WG We thank you.

NL The museum and the library are working on the history of Estes.

WG Lois has a remarkable memory. She's ninety-three and is in a nursing home.

NL When did your dad die?

BG About six years ago.

ML Your mother was a Carr. Was the librarian Ora Carr related?

WG No relation. Carr Park in Longmont is named for her.

BG My mother was a Carr. Her mother was a McGuire.

NL Thank you for sharing with us.

WG Thank you.

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